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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

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U. S. DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE
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SUBJECT: "A Stitch Ahead of Time" Information from clothing specialists of the United States Department of Agriculture.

Back in Colonial days thrifty housewives taught their young daughters, "A stitch in time saves nine." And that good old-fashioned mending advice has been passed down from mother to daughter ever since. In fact, today we're learning to go the old proverb one better and make it a stitch ahead of time.

Of course you don't buy any clothes you don't really need these days, but when you do have to buy things, you want to get your wear out of them. So, to get the best possible service, clothing specialists of the U.S. Department of Agriculture recommend reinforcing a ready-made garment before you wear it, with a few well-placed stitches. That makes good clothes sense any time, and especially now when wartime production difficulties often mean poor workmanship in clothes.

Well, let's suppose you're looking over a new dress. You know the obvious places to check...so you'll give it a quick once-over to see if there are any insecure seams or hems or weak buttonholes . . . or loose buttons or snappers or hooks and eyes. There are a few other places to check too . . .pocket corners, plackets, bindings, and dangling threads and finishing details.

I hope this isn't beginning to sound as though you'll practically have to make the dress over... because you'll usually just find a few places that need reinforcing. Of all these spots, you're most likely to have trouble with weak seams, so let's take a look at the ... well ... call it the "seamy side" of things, first. Sometimes on a cotton house dress the seams are too narrow, or they've been stitched loosely. Such seams may pop open when you stretch up to the top cupboard or stoop down to pick up Junior's toys--and then the never-ending repair jobs begin...unless you've wisely put in some reinforcements ahead of time.

On an ordinary cotton house dress it might not seem worth-while ripping out

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and restitching seams, especially when there's an easier way. You can strengthen them by running another row of stitching just inside the first seam. Set your sewing machine at 14 to 16 stitches to the inch ... that's a good, firm stitch.

On a better garment, it's worth your time to rip out any broken, knotty, drawn or crooked stitching and stitch it again. If your material seems to fray, run a row of machine stitching near the cut edges. Or you can overcast the seam edges if you don't have a sewing machine or if the material frays badly. Overcasting usually is best for seams in wool or rayon garments.

Here's another inside job that's sometimes necessary. Particularly on lower-priced garments, you may find dangling threads where the stitching ends. If these loose ends are left at seam ends, on pleat edges, or where the tucks end, the stitching may break and pull out later. So, pull the threads to the inside and tie securely. Or here's an even better way if the threads are long enough: run them through a needle and fasten with a few over-and-over stitches.

Now on the outside of the dress: Check the collar edges and neck openings. If they seem a little stretchy and likely to lose their shape with wear, you can sometimes make them stronger, and more attractive besides, with a row or two of top-stitching. Top-stitching is also a good idea for reinforcing a belt or the bottom of a sleeve.

Down to the placket. That poor placket takes a lot of strain when you hurriedly jerk a dress over your head. It's a good idea to strengthen the ends with a few extra stitches. Or, you can sew tape to reinforce the ends on the underside.

From plackets to pockets. One simple way to reinforce a pocket so it won't tear is to take a few extra stitches on the corners of the opening.

And there are several other things you can do to get a new dress off to a good start--like replacing any cheap-looking or sleazy trim with more durable trimming.

So, from collar to seams to hem, give a new garment the once-over. And remember, a stitch ahead of time makes your clothes wear their best and keep looking their best longer.

